

*Sánchez. Murcia: an Edward Soja Postmetrópolis*

# Murcia: a Soja Postmetropolis

## a transposition of Edward Soja's Postmetropolis in the Region of Murcia

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### Introduction

The conglomeration of diffuse urban areas situated along the Mediterranean coast in the provinces of Murcia and Alicante can be informally considered to be Spain's third metropolis [1]. With almost 2 million inhabitants in an area of 3.580 km<sup>2</sup>, it constitutes a territory where 8 of the 25 fastest growing urban areas in Spain between 1981 and 2006 were located before the housing boom began.

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, this area, like much of Spain, maintained an economic model based upon housing speculation – with a surplus of available housing, the exhaustion and destruction of natural resources and an abandonment of the basic sectors that supported the function and sustainable development of cities in favour of short term benefits.

Housing speculation has operated on a development model based on anarchical occupation and dispersion [3] of territory. The prototype has been one of urbanisation disconnected to an urban nucleus [4] with a maximum exponent of the resort model: low-density construction linked to a leisure centre such as a golf resort or shopping mall [5].

The explosion of the housing bubble and confirmation of economic crisis in 2007[6] caused numerous businesses associated with the promotion and construction of this territorial model [7] to go bankrupt; paradoxically, though, not those businesses that economically supported the initial boom.

Meanwhile, the ruling political class has continued to cling to 'emblematic projects' [8] that assumed the entrance of foreign capital would reactivate the economy in the same way as had happened during the previous cycle.

The present study is a brief incursion into this territory in order to identify urban processes, as well as to discern the path of modifications that have been produced as well as those that will manifest in the future.

To that end, this territory will be compared to another area of greater surface, population and complexity, about which numerous theoretical studies have been performed in recent decades and which has even instituted a school of urban studies. I am referring to Los Angeles and the Los Angeles School in general terms and more concretely to Edward Soja and his text, *Postmetropolis* [9].

It is not my goal to support the ideal of Los Angeles as a paradigm upon which a whole urban theory was built [10]. Conversely, the purpose of this study is to

contribute to the discussion of postmodern cities [11] and develop a method that permits the inclusion of phenomena with diverse amplitude and nature, and that is based upon the relationship of articulation and pertinence [12].

As E. Soja previously hypothesised, the particularities of Los Angeles can be extrapolated and its urban processes can aid in the understanding, theoretically and in practice, what is happening in other parts of the world.

E. Soja focused his study of urban processes on six postmetropolis that comprise six ways of analysing and interpreting the reconstruction of a modern metropolis.

*The postfordist industrial metropolis* and *cosmopolis* provide an explanation for the causes of urbanisation during the last 30 years.

*The exopolis* and *fractal city* define the urban consequences of globalisation and global economic reconstruction.

*Carceral cities* and *simulated cities* represent two different ways of survival against transformation.

Each of the above models follows a particular transformation dynamic based on the destruction of an existing system and reconstruction of a new one.

Extrapolating these processes to the study area, and considering the differences in scale and intensity [13], it can be stated a priori that, in regard to *postfordist industrial postmetropolis* and *cosmopolis*, the most significant industrial processes in the area are linked to a fordist productive system and cosmopolisation of the city that have occurred on a much smaller scale in comparison with Los Angeles [14].

However, the processes defined in Los Angeles as a consequence of globalisation – *the exopolis* and *fractal city* – are present as the most frequently used urbanisation processes in the area and concur to a lesser degree with expressions of carceral and simulated cities.

In fact, the existence of housing developments in areas that are completely disconnected from the mother city, malls located at highway crossings where no commercial activities existed before, or recent international applications to construct amusement parks demonstrate that despite the different causes of urban reconstruction, the consequences are very similar.

It can be concluded that some of the cited urban processes – golf resorts, amusement parks, and the indirect promotion of car usage – have the same origin as the Los Angeles urbanisation process and highlight the importance of globalisation in city planning, thereby promoting a standard, common landscape [15].

These extrapolations constitute a methodological approach to the interpretation of the urban processes that occurred in the study area, thereby helping to define its peculiarities by applying urban theories for the first time to a metropolis that has yet to be defined as such.

## References

- [1] **1/Madrid** : 5.639.524 hab; **2/Barcelona**: 4.842.703 hab; **4/Valencia**: 1.478.186 hab; **Ministerio de Vivienda (2006)**, Atlas estadístico de las Áreas Urbanas 2006, Secretaría General Técnica, Centro de Publicaciones. <http://siu.vivienda.es/> acc. March 2011.
- [2] **Cirugeda, Santiago y Cruz, Guillermo** (2009), *Espanish Drëam*. <http://vimeo.com/6779294>. acc. March 2011.
- [3] The term is meant in the sense as established by the RAE dictionary: “absence of public power, disconcerting or incoherent” wanting to denounce the lack of involvement of the public administration in pursuit of the common interest in city planning.
- [4] Evidently, not all urban projects have been created in this sense, but it highlights the disconnection in a wide range of social and urban parameters between existing and new cities.
- [5] One out of every three approved or constructed houses in the Region of Murcia were associated with a golf resort. **Greenpeace (2007)** “Destrucción a toda Costa”.
- [6] I refer to the international crisis which manifested in August of 2007, as a result of the collapse of North American banking entities due to speculation on high-risk mortgage bonds, which, within months spread to Europe and the rest of the world. Also, to the subsequent denial of the crisis by the Spanish government in the months preceding and following August 2007.
- [7] In the beginning, businesses directly related to the promotion and construction of houses; later, technical equipment and other businesses indirectly associated with the construction sector; however, never those businesses that have been related to the financing of the operations, such as banks or insurance companies.
- [8] The term ‘emblematic projects’ coincides in this case with the name of the business that J. Samper created to promote a Paramount theme park in Murcia. The term also refers to projects such as Marina Cope, Contentpolis or the Parque Tecnológico in Murcia.
- [9] **Soja, Edward**. (2008), *Postmetropolis: estudios críticos sobre las ciudades y las regiones*, Traficantes de sueños, Madrid [Original edition: *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*, Los Angeles: Blackwell Publishing, 2000; Translation: Verónica Hendel and Mónica Cifuentes].
- [10] Here, I refer to the theories that Jan Nijman established from the school of Miami, **Jan Nijman**, “The Paradigmatic City”, in *Annals of The Association of American Geographers*, 90:1, 2000, pages. 144.; and those that **Mark Gottidienerm, Claudia Collins and David Dickens** set forth in “Las Vegas: The Social Production of an All-American City, 1999; also claiming to consider Miami and Las Vegas, respectively, as the most representative archetypes for a new urban paradigm.
- [11] “Modernist’ town planner, for example, do tend to look for ‘mastery’ of the metropolis as a ‘totality’ by deliberately designing a ‘closed form’, whereas postmodernists tend to view the urban process as uncontrollable and ‘chaotic’, one in which ‘anarchy’ can ‘play’ in entirely in entirely ‘open’ situations.” **David Harvey. (1990)**, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Blackwell Publishing, London.
- [12] **Elias de Castro, Ina** (2002), *El Problema de la Escala*. *Quaderns Journal*, 233, pp.30-31.
- [13] Only population differences make these leaps in scale obvious: In 2009, Los Angeles had 13 million inhabitants in comparison with 2 million in the study area.
- [14] Immigrants comprise 12% of the population in the Region of Murcia. Source: INE.2010.
- [15] As stated by Francesc Muñoz: “a landscape defined by its ambiguous ubiquity” [...]” a phenomena of a very complex nature; but, it is not an obstacle due to the fact that the urban experience in different places is, paradoxically, similar and exchangeable”.
- [16] **Muñoz, Francesc** (2008), *Urbanalización: Paisaje comunes, lugares globales*, Editorial Gustavo Gili, Barcelona.

